

February 10, 2011

Testimony on the following bills:

S.B. 840 AN ACT CONCERNING EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES FOR PARTICIPANTS IN THE JOBS FIRST

H.B. 5558 – AN ACT CONCERNING EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR RECIPIENTS OF TEMPORARY FAMILY ASSISTANCE BENEFITS UNDER THE JOBS FIRST PROGRAM

Submitted by: Wayne Valaitis, Vice President of Operations, FSW, Inc., formerly Family Services Woodfiels

Senator Musto, Representative Tercyak and mebers of the Human Services Committee:

My name is Wayne Valaitis, I am Vice President of Operations, FSW, Inc., *formerly Family Services Woodfield*, a family services program that provides human services in the greater Bridgeport areas. One of the programs that I supervise is the WorkSkills program which provides educational and employment training to Jobs First eligible participants.

I am here today to support Senate Bill # 840 and House Bill# 5558 both of which are recommending that educational activities be allowed for Jobs First participants.

I have been working in the non-profit field for more than 20 years and in Adult Education Workforce Development for the past 7 years.

It is during those 7 years that we have been providing employment skills training under the Jobs First Employment Services (JFES) program. We provide trainings that lead certifications from the National Retail Federation as Professional Customer Service Representatives. We are also a CISCO Networking Academy and provide trainings that lead to A+ Certification from CompTIA and leads to jobs as computer repair technicians.

Please allow me to present how our WorkSkills program goes. When a JFES participant comes to our program the first thing we provide is an intake interview this is used to develop an Individualized Employment Plan. What we have found during this intake interview with the 242 JFES clients that we have worked with is that 49% of our clients have not achieved High School completion. We have also found that 52% have a reading deficiency, that is they scored lower than 235 on our CASAS reading assessment which means they have less than a 9th grade reading level. During our intake process we have found that 87% of our JFES clients have a Math deficiency, again below 235 on CASAS math assessment.

It is plain to see that for the most part our JFES participants need to overcome educational deficiencies if they are going to enjoy employment success. But, here is the really awful part.

One of the programs that FSW provides is the National External Diploma Program (NEDP), this is a way for adults to achieve a High School Diploma by going through a process of proving life skills competencies. If I were to provide the NEDP to our JFES clients they would be in violation of DSS regulations of the JFES program and could be sanctioned. Even knowing when an individual achieves a High School Diploma they will earn an additional \$200,000 in their lifetime, I cannot help them with the NEDP program because they could be sanctioned and lose TFA benefits.

If I can help these clients earn a High School Diploma they would now be eligible for trainings that lead to certifications in the Healthcare Industry in Medical Transcription or Medical Billing and Coding, two jobs that would provide a living income in Fairfield County for a family of 3 of \$41,000. But I cannot help them achieve that High School Diploma which would help our clients earn a living income because they would be sanctioned and lose their TFA and JFES benefits.

Why is that, well currently due to regulations if a participant is receiving JFES benefits they must meet their work participation rates of 30 hours a week in employment training. Now of that 30 hours, currently they can spend 10 hours in remedial education or GED preparation. But taking part in only 10 hours of remediation per week would require far too much time for participants to achieve that which they need most, a High School Diploma. This needs to change. I have mentioned just two ways in which JFES participants would enjoy more employment success if they were allowed to take part in more educational activities. The list of potential benefits is endless.

I encourage you to support the increased availability of educational participation as a countable activity for JFES participants. By including more education you would allow these participants to end the cycle of dependence which they are currently trapped in.

Thank you for your attention in this matter.